



Mark Sterk (R)  
State Representative

4th District

# 1997 Session Report

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## Committees:

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- Education
- Transportation Policy  
and Budget



Dear Friends,

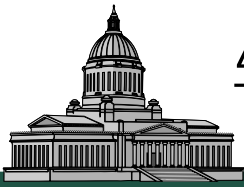
When the 1997 Legislature completed its 105-day session on April 27, it marked the first year since 1957 that state lawmakers had finished a budget-writing session on time. That achievement alone made it a very historic and productive session. In fact, it was arguably the most organized and effective session in the state's history.

We passed a two-year budget that increases funding for K-12 and higher education while limiting state spending to its smallest increase since the 1971-73 budget. And we were able to complete the promises we made to citizens almost three years ago when we pledged to reform the state's welfare and juvenile justice systems, and to lower taxes.

These and other issues are covered in greater detail in this newsletter. Please take a few moments to read it. If you have questions or comments about bills mentioned in this report, or other measures, please call me at home or contact my Olympia office. I look forward to hearing from you. Also, if you ever experience a problem with state government, don't hesitate to call me. One of my duties is to help you when you need assistance in dealing with a state agency.

Sincerely,

*Mark Sterk*



## 4th District

# 1997 Session Report

### 1997-99 operating budget

The \$19.073 billion operating budget is \$112 million below the limit set by Initiative 601. This budget represents a 7.7 percent increase over the previous biennium, which is the smallest biennial increase since 1971. The spending plan leaves the state with a reserve fund of \$366 million. Several important areas are funded. Here is a summary of how the budget will be spent:

**K-12 education:** The budget provides \$8.9 billion for our public schools — a 7.1 percent spending increase over the previous budget. This includes a 3 percent salary increase for teachers and other education employees, and \$20 million for instruction materials, including books, classroom supplies and software (\$458 per average-size classroom).

**Higher education:** About \$2.2 billion will go toward our state's colleges and universities. This funding does not include money in the 1997-99 capital budget for construction and repair projects on our higher education campuses. The goal of greater access was addressed, as the budget provides an additional 6,390 enrollment slots, including 4,200 slots for our community and technical college system. Washington State University will receive 590 additional slots over the next two years, including 320 for the Pullman campus and 90 for the Spokane branch campus. There also is \$34 million provided for financial aid programs, including the State Need Grant, State Work Study and Educational Opportunity Grant programs. College faculty and staff will receive a 3 percent raise, and there is \$4 million in funding for the faculty retention pool, which will allow colleges and universities to keep their best and brightest faculty members.

**Basic Health Plan:** The budget provides an additional 8,000 openings for the BHP, which provides subsidized health care for low-income families.

### Tax reductions made

The Legislature this year approved \$414 million in tax cuts. That tax relief is aimed at property taxpayers, senior citizens and small businesses.

The Legislature and Gov. Locke approved a one-year extension of the 4.7 percent reduction in the state property tax levy that was enacted in 1995. However, the governor vetoed a comprehensive and long-term property tax relief and reform package that was passed by the House and Senate. The Legislature then sent this package to the ballot as a referendum, allowing Washington voters to have the final say in November. Under the comprehensive package, the owner of a \$110,000 home would save about \$50 next year, as much as \$540 over the next five years, and up to \$23,000 over the life of a 30-year mortgage.

The Legislature voted overwhelmingly to complete the repeal of the business and occupation tax increase imposed in 1993. That tax hike targeted selected businesses, with increases of up to 66 percent placing a huge burden on many small employers. After the governor vetoed our first bill that would have begun the repeal this year, he agreed to sign a similar measure that will begin implementation of the repeal in 1998.

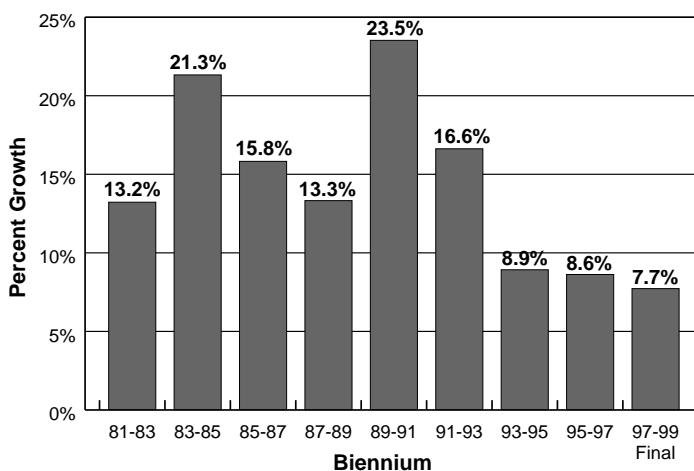
### Welfare reform measure signed into law

The Legislature passed a very historic bill that will reform the state's 60-year-old welfare system. This measure will emphasize personal responsibility and reward work. The jointly sponsored proposal, House-Senate Bill 3901, was signed into law. The bill includes the following components:

**Time limits:** Welfare recipients will receive benefits up to 60 months in a lifetime. Extensions will apply for the disabled, extreme hardship cases or victims of domestic violence.

**Required work activities:** From the time they enter the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, all adult welfare recipients will be required to take part in the Washington Work First Program. They will first be required to search for a job. If they cannot find one, they will have to participate in subsidized or unsubsidized work, on-the-job training, vocational education or community service.

General Fund - State Expenditures  
Biennial Percent Change



# Rep. Mark Sterk (R)

**Child care:** TANF recipients and low-income wage earners will be able to receive child-care assistance. A \$10 co-pay will be required for most recipients.

**Increased earnings:** Recipients will be able to work more and keep more of their work-related income.

**License suspension:** The bill authorizes the suspension of any state-issued business, occupational, and driver's license that is held by a parent who is more than six months behind in his or her child support obligation and refuses to cooperate in a payment plan.

**Diverting people from welfare:** A program will be created to divert people from welfare. Low-income families will be able to receive cash assistance to meet short-term needs (food, clothing, automobile repairs and other employment-related needs) that would otherwise cause them to go on welfare. Assistance will be limited to \$1,500, and a family can receive diversion assistance only once in a 12-month period.

## Juvenile justice system to be reformed

After lengthy negotiations, the House and Senate unanimously passed a measure that will reform the state's outdated and flawed juvenile justice system created in 1977.

House-Senate Bill 3900 ensures that older juvenile offenders will face some type of punishment for their crime, starting with the first offense.

Under the bill, 16- and 17-year-olds automatically will go to the adult court system if they are accused of drive-by shootings, first-degree robbery, first-degree child rape, first-degree burglary with a previous conviction, and any crime in which the offender was armed with a firearm. Currently, offenders ages 16 and 17 who commit murder and rape, or who are chronic and violent offenders, automatically are sent to the adult court system.

The bill replaces the old "point system" with a new, simplified sentencing system for juveniles. The new sentencing range will be based on the seriousness of the

current offense and the number of felony and misdemeanor offenses.

The measure includes several alternatives to jail or prison time, including boot camps, home detention, community service and mandatory school attendance.

Other key parts include a requirement for parents to participate in court proceedings involving their children, and requirements to house those juvenile offenders sentenced to adult prison in a housing unit separate from adult inmates, and to provide an education program for offenders under 18 who haven't met high school or graduation equivalency diploma (GED) requirements.



*Rep. Sterk makes a speech on the House floor*

## Other key issues —

The following is a list of important bills, divided by issue, that were addressed by lawmakers. Most of these measures passed the Legislature and were sent to the governor.

### *K-12 and higher education*

HB 1581 - I prime-sponsored this measure, which will improve safety for students and teachers by making it easier to keep violent, disruptive students, gang members, and juvenile sex offenders out of schools. Signed by the governor.

HB 1841 - Signed by Locke, this proposal will increase options for student discipline by 1) curbing the growing threat of

gangs in schools by providing schools with additional discipline options for students involved in gang-related activities; 2) reducing the threat of violence in classrooms by allowing teachers to expel students from classrooms for engaging in substance abuse activities; and 3) alerting school administrators when enrolled students have been convicted of violent crimes.

HB 2042 - Under this reading bill, school districts will be required to choose a reading-skill evaluation test from a list provided by the superintendent of public instruction and to administer it to all second graders by the 1998-99 school year. Students not reading at grade level will be

given extra help. It will establish a grant program to provide teachers professional development in teaching reading and to provide effective models for use statewide. Signed by the governor.

HB 1372 - Will establish a prepaid tuition payment program to help make higher education affordable and accessible to all Washingtonians. This program will allow family members to buy tuition units for their children or other relatives at today's prices. These units could be purchased in small quantities over the years before a youngster is ready for college. Signed into law.

## Transportation

The Legislature passed a \$3.3 billion two-year transportation budget that does not include a gasoline tax increase as was proposed earlier this year. I couldn't support a gas tax increase because I felt that the extra costs incurred by motorists in Eastern Washington would outweigh any benefits that our region would receive. Many legislators were unwilling to support a gas tax hike without more assurances that revenue would be directed to highway projects. While the 1997-99 transportation budget does not provide money to begin new projects, it does provide money to continue and complete ongoing transportation projects. These include several projects on Interstate 90, such as the Evergreen Road interchange, Pines Road interchange safety modification, Harvard Road interchange, and the stretch between Sprague Avenue and Argonne Road. Funding also is provided for the project on State Route 290 between Fancher Road and Sullivan Road.

One of the highlights of this budget is that \$100 million in Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET) revenue

originally in the operating budget was shifted toward transportation needs.

## 1997-99 capital budget

The capital construction budget is \$1.884 billion. It focuses on maintenance and preservation projects. The budget earmarks \$22.48 million for Eastern Washington University. This includes \$4 million for infrastructure renovations, \$2.755 million for roof replacements, \$5.35 million for minor works preservation, and \$924,000 for the expansion and remodeling of Monroe Hall.

About \$1.7 million is provided for the design of a new health sciences building at Riverpoint Higher Education Park, a planned joint-centered campus in Spokane that would allow graduate students to take courses offered by Spokane Falls Community College, Washington State University, EWU, Whitworth College and Gonzaga University. For instance, a Gonzaga graduate could take a post-graduate course through Eastern at Riverpoint, and vice versa. It's an innovative idea that shows a lot of promise.

## Reforming state regulations

HB 1032 - This regulatory reform measure focuses on the problems of rules which already are in existence. It also would reinstate some of the provisions of last year's regulatory reform bill that were vetoed by then-Gov. Lowry. HB 1032 would require state agencies to review all existing state rules and regulations and tighten the process for adopting new rules. All existing rules and regulations would have to be reviewed in the next seven years, and those that are duplicative, unnecessary or outdated would be eliminated. However, the governor vetoed this section.

